

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00380 301241Z

ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 2869

S E C R E T BEIRUT 0380

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, IS, US

SUBJECT: ASF DEPLOYMENT IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

REF: STATE 20946

1. I CALLED ON FONMIN BOUTROS AT HIS HOME AT 1000 JAN 30 AND PRESENTED POINTS PARA ONE REFTEL. BOUTROS TOOK VERY CAREFUL NOTES OF MY PRESENTATION, AND EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR USG COMMENTS. HE SAID HE WOULD BE CONSULTING URGENTLY WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS TO SEE IF SOMETHING CAN BE WORKED OUT TO REDUCE TENSION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON. BOUTROS SAID THAT PRESIDENT SARKIS WOULD BE GOING TO DAMASCUS ON WEDNESDAY FOR POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS WITH SYRIAN LEADERS AND WOULD CONSULT WITH THEM ON THIS PROBLEM AFTER THE LEBANESE HAD STUDIED IT AMONG THEMSELVES.

2. BOUTROS ASKED IF HIS PROPOSALS TO ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN PASSED TO THEM. I REPLIED THAT THEY HAD, INCLUDING HIS REPORT TO ME THAT THERE WERE IN FACT NO REPEAT NO ASF FORCES IN NABAATYAH ITSELF, BUT THAT WE HAD NOT YET RECEIVED A RESPONSE. BOUTROS REPEATED THAT THERE ARE NO ASF FORCES IN NABATIYAH AND SAID THAT
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ASF COMMANDER AL-HAJJ HAD ISSUED ORDERS THAT THERE WERE TO BE NO MOVEMENTS OR REINFORCEMENTS OF ANY ASF UNITS IN THE NABATIYAH AREA WITHOUT WRITTEN ORDERS FROM HIM. BOUTROS SAID THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE ISRAELI REACTION TO HIS PROPOSALS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE SINCE THEY WOULD BE IMPORTANT IN GOL CONSIDERATION OF WHAT FURTHER STEPS IT MIGHT TAKE TO REDUCE TENSIONS. I

PROMISED TO PASS GOI REACTIONS TO HIM AS SOON AS I RECEIVED THEM.

3. BOUTROS PROMISED TO EXAMINE WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS, ASF COMMANDER AL-HAJJ AND OTHER APPROPRIATE MILITARY AUTHORITIES THE CURRENT AND PROSPECTIVE SECURITY SITUATION IN THENABATIYAH AREA RELATIVE TO THE PRESENCE OF THE ASF TROOPS IN ORDER TO PROVIDE US WITH A MORE DETAILED ASSESSMENT AS REQUESTED.

4. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH BOUTROS DID NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF FINDING SOME FORMULA THAT WOULD ENABLE THE SYRIAN ASF UNITS TO BE WITHDRAWN FROM THE NABATIYAH AREA AT SOME POINT, HE WAS NOT PREPARED TO COMMIT HIMSELF TO THIS WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS AND RECEIVING THE ISRAELI REACTION TO HIS SUGGESTIONS ON HOW THE GOI COULD REDUCE THE ANXIETIES OF ITS PEOPLE. IT IS ALSO OBVIOUS THAT, EVEN IF THE LEBANESE WERE PREPARED TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO SUCH A FORMULA, THEY WOULD HAVE TO OBTAIN SYRIAN CONCURRENCE. BOUTROS IS WELL AWARE OF THE DIFFICULTIES SUCH A WITHDRAWAL POSES FOR THE ASAD GOVERNMENT UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES.

5. ON MILITARY SITUATION IN THE AREA, FRENCH MILATT HAS TOLD OUR DATT THAT WHEN HE TRAVELED FROM KFAR HUNI TO NABATIYAH ON JAN 26, HE FOUND ONE PLATOON-SIZED FORCE IN EACH VILLAGE BETWEEN KFAR HUNI AND KFAR TIBNIT (TOTAL OF ABOUT 10), EACH ACCOMPANIED BY
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ONE TANK, BUT NO REPEAT NO SYRIAN TROOPS IN NABATIYAH ITSELF.

6. WE ARE STRUCK BY RECENT INTELLIGENCE REPORTS OF INCREASED MILITARY ACTIVITY ALONG UDAYSAH - KFAR KILLA AXIS DURING PAST TEN DAYS, WHEN ASF WAS MOVING TO STRENGTHEN ITS POSITION THROUGHOUT LEBANON. ON JAN 21/22 CHRISTIAN FORCES FROM QULAYAH, REPORTEDLY WITH ISRAELI SUPPORT, OCCUPIED THE VILLAGE OF UDAYSAH, TAKING SOME PALESTINIAN PRISONERS. AFTER ASF ADVANCED TO NABATIYAH AREA, CHRISTIAN FORCES, WITH ISRAELI SUPPORT IF NOT ENCOURAGEMENT, ATTACKED TEL LUBYAH, DAYR MIMAS AND KFAR KILLA. FATAH ATTEMPTS TO REINFORCE THEIR TROOPS IN THESE TOWNS WERE REPORTEDLY BLOCKED BY PRESENCE OF THE SYRIAN ASF POST AT KFAR TIBNIT. IF THESE REPORTS ARE TRUE, IT IS HARD TO UNDERSTAND WHY ISRAELIS WOULD WANT THE BLOCKING POST AT KFAR TIBNIT REMOVED UNLESS THEY ARE DELIBERATELY TRYING TO KEEP THE POT BOILING IN THIS AREA AND INCREASE CHRISTIAN DEPENDENCE ON THEM.

7. SUGGEST DEPT PASS DAMASCUS AND TEL AVIV.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TROOP DEPLOYMENT, MILITARY BUILDUP, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION, CAT-C
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 30-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BEIRUT00380
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: P850050-2298
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t1977015/aaaaadof.tel
Line Count: 119
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 5a2a71d9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 77 STATE 20946
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3591442
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ASF DEPLOYMENT IN SOUTHERN LEBANON
TAGS: PFOR, PDEV, MORG, US, LE, IS, (SARKIS ILYAS)
To: STATE SS MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5a2a71d9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009